

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 301 882

CS 211 608

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TITLE Writing-To-Learn Terminology: Sourcebook for
Instructors.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 21p.
PUB TYPE Reference Materials -
Vocabularies/Classifications/Dictionaries (134) --
Guides - Classroom Use - Materials (For Learner)
(051)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Content Area Writing; Glossaries; Higher Education;
Writing (Composition); *Writing Across the
Curriculum; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Process Approach (Writing); *Writing to Learn

ABSTRACT

This sourcebook presents brief, two-sentence definitions of 96 terms used in the writing to learn movement, such as "brainstorming," "expressive writing," "guided imagery," and "transactional writing." A brief introduction describes the writing-to-learn movement which is designed to help students learn new information while not emphasizing particular styles of writing in the various disciplines. The sourcebook also states that the writing-to-learn approach is prevalent in basic courses where the emphasis is on content and expression of ideas. (RS)

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WRITING-TO-LEARN TERMINOLOGY

SOURCEBOOK FOR INSTRUCTORS

Emory & Henry College

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What is Writing-to-Learn?

The writing across the curriculum movement has several effects on college writing programs. Emphases have been on learning to write and on writing to learn. The former approach operates under the assumption that college students need to review basic grammar and usage and to write more coherent paragraphs. It also more nobly assumes that each discipline has a specific rhetorical approach which students must master in order to learn the discipline. For example, the science student must learn to write lab reports and the history student must learn the nature of historiography. Instructors who are familiar with their disciplines can provide models of disciplinary writing and help students to see how the language of a discipline relates to the knowledge of a discipline.

The writing-to-learn approach, on the other hand, involves a wide variety of often tentative or free activities which are designed to help students to learn new information. A complementary effect can be on basic writing quality, since composition specialists believe that the best way to learn to write is to write. Writing-to-learn activities can be used in tandem with disciplinary writing in advanced courses. In basic courses, when the emphasis is on a particular content, writing-to-learn often prevails. During these activities, the emphasis is on content and expression of ideas. References to errors, if made at all, are tied to content and expression of ideas.

abstract

A brief summary of another's text, this is a way of encouraging students to sum up reading assignments and to get at essential elements and main ideas. It may also be a way of getting them to sum up their own formal writing assignments. It is useful because it allows the instructor to gauge the student's reading comprehension.

acronym

A definition written to match the letters of a word, the acronym helps students to remember key ideas presented by new subject matter.

action research paper

When students do original research which involves interviewing people or directly observing, they write "action research papers" to chronicle what they learned from an experience. The experience is as important as the paper. The paper can be tied to library research, however, and can introduce students to primary research methodology.

admit slips

Short--free or directed--responses to homework or reading assignments, admit slips are prepared by students before entering class. They may be read aloud by instructors or students to start discussion. Like abstracts, they indicate levels of reading comprehension but they also raise questions and can lead to analysis.

advance organizer

A psychological tool to include any kind of activity that involves getting students to think about what they already know about a concept before it is introduced, the advance organizer helps them to match what they already know to what they are learning. If students are to learn about animal communication systems, for example, it might help to start by asking them what they already know about human systems so they can adapt and contrast this information. If students who have never been to prison are to read heavy theoretical assignments on prison psychology, for example, it might be wise to first show them a documentary on a prison. The advance organizer prepares both the attitude and the intellect.

biopoe m

A poem about an individual being studied, this can grow out of an acronym or it can be free verse. The writing of biopoe ms may follow a brainstorming activity in which students list key traits/ characteristics of someone on the board. This serves the same purpose as the acronym.

book report

Students are called upon to summarize and critique. Since students often think that a book report calls for simple summary, a book report assignment can be an opportune time to introduce them to the art of the critique and reviews. Models for their disciplines can help.

brainstorming

This activity involves inspiring students to put all ideas down without forethought so they can be sifted through later. Students should be told that they are not to worry about grammar or organization, that they should just write everything that comes to mind in relation to your assignment. They may be called upon, for example, to write down everything that comes to mind about photosynthesis. It is a useful activity to be done as an advance organizer or to get students back on track and it works well on the board. Students, however, may be called upon to brainstorm in their journals on their own time. It is also a way to start clustering or mapping information.

card files

Students, instead of keeping classroom notes in traditional notebook form may keep card or, during reading, may keep a card per fact to be learned. This is a way to minimize confusion growing out of myriads of facts. It helps some students to study and to group related information from different sources and days.

checklist

The checklist can be an ongoing list which notes everything (almost everything) students need to keep track of in relation to teacher evaluations of their work or tests. As they pass from one assignment to the next, they can monitor their weaknesses and build on their strengths. While studying for a final exam in French, a student may

be able to concentrate on intransitive verbs and the subjective instead of a semester's worth of work if those are the areas he or she seemed to be weak in consistently across the term. A checklist is also a useful way to help students track and analyze their unique grammatical problems.

class log

Prepared at the end of class, this answers the question "What did we do today?" It is a useful activity for the last ten minutes of class and can help an instructor decide what to do next. What information did not sink in? What was misinterpreted? What was most fascinating?

clustering

Clustering is a brainstorming sort of activity in which one takes similar ideas/concepts/words and groups them; this procedure leads to definitions based on what the ideas have in common. Instructors should model it on the board during class discussions so that student may see how ideas can be related and contrasted. Students then may cluster in their journals as they are coming up with paper ideas.

cognitive objectives

Underlying all writing-to-learn activities are a cognitive objectives over which the instructor has control. Introduced originally by Benjamin Bloom to evaluate learning, these are useful to keep in mind during the construction of writing-to-learn activities

knowledge

Remembering facts.

Activities: Cite, define, identify, label, list, match, name, recognize, reproduce, select, state.

comprehension

Understanding/grasping.

Activities: Convert, describe, estimate, explain, extend, give examples, illustrate, interpret, paraphrase, summarize, translate.

application

Using previously learned information in new, concrete situations.

Activities: Apply, compute, construct, demonstrate, discover, modify, operate, predict, prepare, produce, relate, show, solve, use.

analysis

Breaking down material into component parts to understand whole.

Activities: Analyze, associate, determine, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, infer, outline, point out.

synthesis

Putting parts together to form a new whole.

Activities: Combine, compile, compose, create, design, develop, devise, integrate, modify, organize, plan, propose, rearrange, reorganize, revise, rewrite, tell, write.

evaluation

Judging material for some purpose/making decisions.

Activities: Appraise, assess, compare, conclude, evaluate, judge, weigh.

collaborative paragraphing

In small groups, students write and add to the same paragraph. This helps them to learn about how knowledge grows and is interrelated. Since the idea is to write a paragraph, not a list of facts, students must read carefully and aspire toward cohesion. Students may write part of a sentence, a word, or several sentences. The object is for each student to lead the next student to continue the train of thought. After the paragraph is complete, the students may edit.

community building

Any strategies that build trust among students and between students and teachers build community. An instructor may take roll, for example, by asking each student to respond to a question about the

day's assignment. Admit slips also help to build community.

contract

Often an agreement between instructor and student on what is to be learned/done for a grade, the contract can also be used to negotiate directions the course will take as it unfolds. Students feel empowered if they are allowed to have a say in what types of writing assignment they must complete or what extra reading they must do.

controlling idea

The controlling idea is the thesis of a text or the topic of a paragraph. Writing about a main idea is a good way for students to reinforce new information, as well as a way for instructors to gauge apprehension.

creative definition

Students invent definitions for new words to be compared to official definitions as they learn. This is a kind of advance organizer. In a basic literature class, for example, students may be asked to invent definitions for counterpoint. They will most likely write definitions closely related to the real definition if they analyze the parts of the word. After this activity, it will be easier for them to learn the technical definition and in turn find counterpoint in Madame Bovary.

critique

This self-assessment or assessment of a classroom experience can come in logs or journals. Students who are actively engaged in critiquing their learning will learn more and reveal needs to instructors just as instructors who are open to critiques of their classroom work will make needed changes and strengthen successful strategies.

description

Descriptive writing relies upon a profusion of details which gives, generally, one single impression. Instructors who ask for a description should expect this and not analysis or summary.

dialectic

This is a way of carrying on a two-way "conversation" within a

notebook either during class or when taking notes on reading. One divides the paper into two sides and takes notes on the right during class in order to go back later to the left margin to write questions that relate to information on the right side. This same procedure used as a way of taking notes on reading can help students to identify main points and to respond critically and personally.

dialogues

Writing dialogues helps students to follow concepts in the way specific characters, perhaps historic, would treat them. It builds perspective.

dictation

Sometimes directed note-taking of specific details, perhaps definitions, can be turned into an activity which allows students to focus on an instructor's words and an instructor to look and see how much students are getting of a lecture or discussion. The instructor may ask students to write everything they hear down as fast as they can and later see how differently students apprehended the information. The next step is for the instructor to model note-taking skills so students will learn how to focus on important information.

discovery

Focused writing can help students to discover new ideas and to connect old with new. It involves having the students write what they know about something before they begin learning it. Creative definitions and freewriting involve discovery.

drafting

This is a new word for writing. It implies that writing is a tentative, malleable, growing process.

dramatic scenario

In class, it is possible to stage something dramatic to spark students' interest or to get their attention. The dramatic scenario may be accomplished when another student delivers a note to class or a guest lecturer arrives suddenly in the middle of what seems to be a serious class and begins orating. Some teachers have been known to enter class dressed in historic costumes and acting in character.

editing

After drafting, editing is what one does to final drafts of writing to correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Editing traditionally is confused with writing. Many instructors focus on editing too early. Early drafts need to be read for content, and the urge to edit needs to be suppressed until writing deserves it.

editing group

This term is used loosely to mean peer review group work. Editing, however, is not usually the focus of this group's work. Consequently, it is not an ideal term to use unless the group is actually called upon to note errors.

essay

An essay is an exploratory, speculative piece of writing which is not organized as tightly as one might expect given the educational use of the word. The word means, literally, "an attempt" to pull ideas together. Content is the key. Sometimes essays start with only a sentence-long introduction. Other times, the self intrudes. Instructors who ask for essays should not be disappointed when they receive true essays. If they want more specialized types of writing, such as critiques or analyses, they should specifically ask for them.

essay exam

Essay exams, for which students write in response to specific questions, can be structured to reinforce knowledge as much as to test retention. This effect can be achieved when the instructor moves from asking for students to repeat information to comparing/contrasting, analyzing, and so on. Essay exams fall between formative and summative writing since they involve first-draft writing. As such, they need to be addressed as first-draft writing and graded in a different way than out-of-class papers. This means that spelling errors, except in key areas, should not be frowned upon too much and that the comma splice will not hurt the grade as much as it would on an out-of-class paper.

exam review booklets

These booklets can be prepared if each student answers a review

question comprehensively to help make a review guide for study. This is also one way to "publish" student writing.

exit slips

If an instructor has students summarize what they have learned, the instructor can assess progress. It is a way to end up a class and to get students back on track when they start rustling books and papers. Unlike the class log, the exit slip usually involves a minute or so of work. Students may be asked, for example, to turn in a tentative thesis statement for an impending research project before they leave the room. The act of writing one down, even though it will change, will help them get started.

expository writing

Technically, expository writing is writing that exposes information via identification, definition, classification, comparison/contrast, cause and effect, and analysis. It is complemented by narration, description, and persuasion.

exploratory writing

Any tentative writing which proposes, diagnoses, or explores can be helpful in the introduction of new ideas. Essays are exploratory. Freewriting can be exploratory.

expressive writing

Any writing (often found in freewriting or journal exercises) that focuses on the self's relation to a subject, how someone feels about it, is expressive. This type of writing can bridge the personal and the public. Often, ideas for formal papers can grow out of undirected, free writing. Expressive writing helps one to find a sense of engagement with new information.

final product

This is the formal paper, last in a series of drafts. It is usually graded.

first draft

Speculative, rough, this draft is not to be looked at except for content. It is what students work with in peer review and what instructors

read to see if students are going in the right direction before they write the official final product.

first thoughts

This is a learning log sort of activity in which students write down the first thing that comes to mind when a new subject is introduced. An advance organizer, this is used to provoke discussion.

fishbowl

This is a class activity in which some students watch another group of students participating in a discussion and take notes on it as they watch analytically; then they take over and report on both content learned and behavior of the group they watched.

flow charts

This involves writing step-by-step directions on how different components or dimensions of a process relate to and flow from one another. It can be useful on the board or for students to do individually in journals.

focused writing

For a short period of time, students write all that comes to mind on a specific, narrow idea. This differs from "first thoughts" in that the instructor is more directive in the instructions. The instructor may ask students to write a specific concept rather than a broad topic.

formative writing

This phrase refers to the process of drafting. It implies again that writing is tentative and growing.

formula poems

These provide a framework for discussion via classification of specific features of a character or concept. The formulae may be decided upon ahead of time so that each time students are called upon to write they know what to do (for example, students may always answer who, what, when, where, and why in poetic yet not necessarily rhymed form).

free association

In this activity, students write one word and see where that takes them. This is a way to open discussion and also to see what students already know about something. It can be done orally with a whole class, or students may free associate on paper to brainstorm.

freewriting

This helps students to get past initial stage fright because they are called upon to write anything and everything that comes to mind, even "I can't think of what to say" over and over again. It frees inhibitions.

goal setting

Students set out expectations for learning in writing and then go back to them throughout the course. This is a form of contract.

group work

Group work involves any number of ways of having students respond in small, non-threatening groups to ideas, writing, and so on. For example, students may engage in small discussions on different topics and then report back to the whole class, or students may write collaborative paragraphs.

guided imagery

An instructor reads or recounts a situation (dramatic, historical, social, or otherwise) and says, "Imagine yourself . . ." Students respond in writing, and as they later share their reactions they might learn about different views toward the same phenomenon.

homework questions

Questions that arise during reading can be noted and passed in at first of class or be used to generate discussion. Admit slips sometimes use homework questions.

informative writing

When the students main responsibility is to repeat facts, often someone else's facts, they are drafting informative writing. Since term papers are often informative, even when instructors would prefer to

see exploratory or scientific writing, it is best to call term papers research papers or reports.

instant version

This is a form of a draft, a quickly written first draft prepared in class to be used as first in a series of drafts toward a formal assignment.

interview

Students interview one another to ascertain what has been learned. Writing in this involves note-taking.

journal

The journal is a reference tool for students to keep track of whatever is going on in and out of class. Often, specific activities are suggested beforehand and during a course. This term is used for a broad, multipurpose text. Since its connotation tends to elicit heartfelt confessions, and not just expressive writing, some instructors have begun to replace it with reading log, learning log, or log. "Journal" is fine as long as the rules are spelled out beforehand, however.

learning log

This term can encompass reading responses, process entries, research logs, unit introductions, and so on in a traditional journal. It is, however, more often used to refer to progress reports on concept development made during class.

letter

This traditional form can focus students to think of a particular audience, particularly someone from a specific era or age or environment. It can be used inside or outside of class.

listing

Sometimes when class discussions become abstract, a listing activity can help students to produce concrete descriptions of abstract ideas. It is a grounding activity in which students list details about the ideas they are discussing.

metaphorical questions

During this activity, students compare themselves to historical or literary figures. They talk about how they are like, for example, Abraham Lincoln or Sojourner Truth.

model

This is what instructors do in class to let students know what to do. If students are to brainstorm, the instructor begins by brainstorming. If students are to freewrite, the instructor sits in his or her desk and freewrites (instead of grading yesterday's learning logs).

modelling

This involves bringing in copies of student writing to share. Sometimes it is useful to offer models for "good," "average," or "poor" exam answers. Average answers are good, since they are not intimidating. It can also involve having students or instructors read excerpts from journals or other writing activities aloud.

narrative

This is a story focusing on a character's perspective or on events. The key to a good narrative is the arrangement (chronological, order of importance, or any logical order).

nurse log

The nurse log is a fallen tree out of which other vegetation grows. It is recalled as an image to inspire writing-to-learn instructors to see first draft and free writing as important writing.

nutshelling

This involves putting everything into just a few words. As an in-class activity turned to in the midst of a lecture, it helps students to focus. The instructor can stop and ask students to compress everything said in the past half hour into a sentence or two.

peer review

This process involves having students look at drafts for ideas and--sometimes--editing. Review may occur in or out of class. It is not a bad idea for the first draft turned into an instructor to go through

peer review and revision first before the instructor comments at all. If both instructor and peers comment, students may ignore peers.

persuasion

Writing activities that involve the exposition of evidence in support of logical, ethical, or emotional appeals to a particular audience's preconceptions about a topic help students to substantiate ideas and to look at both sides since persuasion also involves taking into account and refuting opposing ideas. Persuasive writing can help students to place themselves in a social context.

poetic writing

Another term for expressive, poetic easily and naturally can be confused with poetic (in the strict sense of the word) unless it is clarified. It is often paired with transactional and is the opposite of transactional, since the primary audience is the self.

prewriting

Anything that precedes a writing activity is prewriting. This includes talking, thinking, living. The term suggests that students are drafting even when they are sitting still thinking or playing volleyball. Prewriting activities, however, may be focused and include journal entries, brainstorming, clustering, biopoems, and so on. Prewriting helps students get ideas for formal papers.

problem-solving

This term implies that students write to think. They use their analytical abilities to solve problems that arise out of questions that come up in reading or class or paper-writing. An instructors may introduce a hypothetical economic crisis and ask students to solve it.

process logs

These in-class exercises reflectively answer the question, "What happens when I do X?" or "What happens as I make a decision about whom to elect president?" Process logs help students to see what supports their learning processes in general so that they may use the process in new situations.

progress report

Not unlike nutshelling, though it can be longer, this comes when an instructor stops in the middle of a lecture and says, "Well, what have I just said?" Students write. This is a way to pull ideas together, to focus, to startle students into listening, to elicit further discussion.

publishing

Publishing need not mean that copies of student work is passed out. It simply means that one needs to ensure that the writing is not just written and forgotten. Examples include reading excerpts from journals, reading model essays, putting a paragraph on the overhead projector.

reading responses

This involves focused writing on a reading assignment, 10 - 15 minutes, often in class, in order to get students to remember what they read the night before and to start class discussion.

recipe

This involves a list of ingredients and how they are put together to comprise a whole. Recipes can be written to describe processes (i.e., emancipation) or events (i.e., the death of Socrates).

report

The report often involves the organization of different ideas from library research. More like the traditional literature review of scholarly writing, the report often serves as the college term paper.

research logs

When students are required to read additional sources from the library, they can monitor themselves with correct bibliographic notations and annotations that help them trace their new knowledge. These can be included in journals or kept separately.

research paper

Often assumed by the novice student to be exercises in paraphrasing, and sometimes accidental exercises in paraphases if instructors' expectations have not been made clear, the research paper ideally

involves both synthesis and analysis of information. Students review and recount others' ideas by mapping the new information to fit a thesis or point that pulls this information together. It helps to introduce students to models of research from the appropriate discipline.

revising

This is a stage in the drafting process in which the student is satisfied with thought and content and is ready to go for accuracy, brevity, tone, style, etc.

role playing

Instructors may have students assume different personae (or become an animal or plant) and write about something from that perspective. This helps students to learn about different viewpoints.

rule sheets

In math, students use their own words to explain methods they use to solve a type of problem each time they come across it. This can be adapted in other courses for students to explain methods they follow to understand similar concepts as they begin to notice patterns. Rule sheets are more functional than process sheets. They involve the "how to," while process logs look at underlying processes that enable one to ask the "how to."

scientific writing

When students draft formal papers through which they (a) prove a point by arguing from accepted ideas or (b) generalizing from particulars or both (a) and (b) they are said to be producing scientific writing.

summary statement

A form of learning log, this can be written in class to summarize the day's lecture. It is not unlike an exit slip or a class log.

summative writing

After formative writing, students begin pulling ideas together and are

ready to say something significant. Final products involve summative writing.

tapes and transcriptions

Tapes can be made for students to follow and review discussions in order to gauge learning. The transcriptions of the tape will help both students and instructor to then watch connections (or gaps) between writing and oral discussion. This activity can also help instructors to see how students perceive.

thinkbook

This is another word for journal.

transactional writing

This term refers to writing whose primary function is communication. Formal assignments, exams, final products are transactional because they involve a transaction between student and instructor.

translation

When reading difficult or archaic texts, students may benefit from substituting language that reflects contemporary or even local usage. This activity, which can be fun, also helps them to look at changing audiences/societies.

treeing

During brainstorming, the instructor may jot things down in an orderly fashion to show relationships between ideas. This is like clustering.

unfinished writing

Formative writing is unfinished writing. Many class writings are not finished--the idea is for students to get words on papers. It has a value in itself. Since we do not ask students to polish and repeat every word spoken in a discussion, they can learn that writing can be as natural and "disposable" as talking.

unit introductions

When a new unit is to be introduced, students may write about what

they suspect is to come by previewing the text. This serves as an advance organizer

unsent letters

These are simply letters in which students write a letter to a specific person explaining a new theory or concept. They differ from letters in that they relate more to the substance or nature of information than information itself and they may not have as specific an audience.

writing groups

When students break up into small groups to talk about their ideas, they are in writing groups. It is often helpful to focus writing group activities with instructions on what to read for so that students will not be inclined to correct spelling only.

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